

Racism in Video Gaming:
Connecting Extremist and Mainstream Expressions of White Supremacy

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ABSTRACT (182): In this chapter, we examine extreme and more mainstream forms of racism in video gaming. We first take up relatively unsophisticated video games, such as Border Patrol, created by members of white supremacist movements. Such water cooler games are crude both in terms of their racism and their lack of technological sophistication. Then, we turn to more popular games, such as Grand Theft Auto III & IV and Saints Row 1 & 2. In many ways, the racism in the games created by white supremacists share much more in common with those created by more mainstream game designers for a popular audience than we might anticipate. We contextualize these manifestations of racism within a prevailing Internet culture in which humor is a primary value, and a wider social context that is supposedly post-racial. By contrasting the various ways racism is both enacted and displayed in these disparate online video games within the broader social context and the specific cultural milieu of Internet culture, we illuminate the way that extremist and more mainstream forms of white supremacy are interwoven and reinforce each other.

Keywords: racism, gaming, white supremacy, video games, online, Internet

Introduction

Millions of people play video games. In 2009, according to the National Public Diary Group (NPD Group), there were an estimated 169.9 million people playing video games in the United States.ⁱ Video games routinely make headline news due to their content, often for violence or for their supposedly addictive qualities. This growing visibility of gaming in the public sphere has led to a noticeable rise in video game studies which grow in complexity each year. However, what few engaged in video games acknowledge – whether playing, designing, reporting on or analyzing games - is the presence of racist content. During the early days of the Internet, some scholars theorized that the emergence of virtual environments and a culture of fantasy would mean a rise in *identity tourism*,ⁱⁱ that is, people using the playful possibilities of gaming to visit different racial and gender identities online. However, the reality that has emerged is quite different. The rise of the popular Internet has shown that racial and gender identities offline are transported, relatively untransformed, into digital constructs, such as, video games.ⁱⁱⁱ Emerging research suggests that players vigorously enforce conformity to offline gender identity, as well as gender norms, in online gaming.^{iv} What has been left largely unexamined until now are the complex ways in which *systemic racism*,^v both overt and subtle, is implicated in video gaming culture. Neither the scholarly literature on race, nor the research on video gaming has taken up the challenge of exploring the intersection of racism in gaming.

In this chapter, we begin the work of addressing this gap in the literature by first examining the crude video games created or co-opted by members of white supremacist movements such as *Border Patrol*. Then, we turn to more popular games, such as *Grand*

Theft Auto III & IV and *Saints Row 1 & 2*, and explore the more subtle racism in these games. We place both kinds of games within the dual context of a prevailing Internet culture in which humor is often the most highly valued commodity, and a wider social context that is supposedly post-racial and largely dismisses charges of racism. By contrasting the various ways systemic racism is both displayed and enacted in these disparate video games, we illuminate the connections between extremist and more mainstream forms of white supremacy.

Background: What Does Gaming Teach Us?

, The way we play is the way we understand the world, according to scholars who study gaming,^{vi} This is most obviously expressed through the way we play games and is uniquely represented through video gaming because video games represent how imaginary and real systems work.^{vii} These ways of constructing and playing in different worlds can be an important mechanism of socialization into the offline world for people who play them. This is sometimes referred to as “the real” world of materiality.^{viii} People learn the implicit rules of society through the explicit rules of play.^{ix} Because those same people create video games, each designers’ view of social reality provides a means through which cultural practices are communicated. For instance, video games that rely on explicit rules of competition and mastery in order to “be number one” among a field of opponents upon penalty of (virtual) death convey important lessons about what it takes to survive in an (actual) economic system premised on a neoliberal ideology of individual striving and a vanishing safety net.

Everything in video games – opening a door, detonating a nuclear bomb, breathing, driving a car, shooting a gun, falling from outer-space, or interacting within

bureaucratic government systems – must be painstakingly programmed. Video game makers can represent almost any object or action possible in society, as well as many that are impossible. The interaction between a video game’s design and the player’s choices in the game allows players to form and act on opinions of how those systems work and the parameters that confine actions within each system. Bogost refers to this interaction as *procedural rhetoric*.^x This procedural rhetoric is far from neutral; in many games, it is laden with systemic racism.

Far from being disembodied and ‘race-less,’ the information age is as racialized as the previous industrial age.^{xi} Cultural studies scholar Lisa Nakamura criticizes of this notion of the Internet as a ‘race-less’ utopia in her book *Cybertypes*. In that book, she demonstrates precisely how, though interface design elements like pull-down menus with categorical lists of racial and ethnic identities, the online world reproduces racial identity constructed offline. This idea that racial oppression is linked to visibility is one that African American scholars have written eloquently about going back to W.E.B. Du Bois. This idea also appears in the literature on ‘race’ and the Internet. Some scholars have argued that the Internet offers a freedom from the visibility of racial oppression through the “decoupling identity from any analogical relation to the visible body.”^{xii} Yet, the supposed invisibility online rests in part on the assumption of the Internet as an exclusively text-based medium in which racial identity is not visible. While that may have been true at one point in time, or may be true today in certain online contexts, it does not adequately describe much of what constitutes life online these days.

Today, the Internet includes digital video and photographic technologies, such as “webcams” along with photo-sharing sites like Flickr.com, and video-sharing sites like

YouTube.com. Most social networking sites, such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com, prominently feature visual elements such as digital photos and sometimes video that serve as important markers of digital representation and identity for people who participate at those sites (indeed, as the name “Facebook” suggests the notion of linking visual representation of the physical body to text is embedded in the purpose of the software). These inherently visual technologies make images of bodies a quotidian part of the gendered and racialized online world. Furthermore, empirical research increasingly demonstrates that people go online, even to text-only online spaces, not as a libertarian utopia of disembodiment, but as a mechanism for engaging in the construction and affirmation of embodied racial identities and these identities are in turn, shaped by power relations.^{xiii} To the extent that race is discussed in the scholarly literature about the Internet, it is usually framed around issues of racial and ethnic identity in online communities.^{xiv} Scant little of this scholarship has discussed racism in video gaming.

Who is Playing?

Video games are overwhelmingly made by and for males.^{xv} They are the playful embodiment of what is commonly referred to as Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). Justine Cassell, in writing about gendering HCI,^{xvi} observes that the formative years of technology use occurs as early as kindergarten and that this training shapes, and continues to shape, how males and females perceive technology. Boys are encouraged to explore the parameters of computer technology while girls are encouraged to use computer technology as simple tools. Thus, HCI is an important form of anticipatory socialization that provides a gateway for boys to learn more about how computer systems work and contributes to the continued male dominance of most technology-based

industries.^{xvii} Research indicates that girls and women report less frequent video game play, less motivation to play games in social situations, and less orientation to game genres featuring competition and three-dimensional rotation.^{xviii} This reluctance may be attributable evidence that demonstrates gaming culture is hegemonically white, heterosexual, and masculine. For example, Lori Kendall argues in her richly nuanced ethnography of the gendered dynamics in the multi-user domain (MUD) “*BlueSky*,” that digital technologies reproduce white, heterosexual, masculine cultures and hierarchies of power.^{xix} While this is by no means conclusive evidence, the preliminary research does indicate a pattern of white male dominance of online spaces.

Video games are conceptualized as similar to, or at the very least coterminous with, Internet technologies. Like Internet technology, video games are often thought to be a “white” activity because of how media presents them.^{xx} American-created video games have reflected the racial environment of post World War II American technological development through the makeup of mostly white male game programmers as well as the procedures or systems included in the games themselves.

Video gaming is predominantly created by white people and played most often by white people. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, a random sample of 12-17 year old children in the U.S. found that 73.9% of all white children play video games while 26.1% of all non-white children play (See Table 1). Many video game researchers contend that games are made mostly by white males, however, it is difficult to find demographic data specifically about game makers. The best data available is related to technology jobs more generally. Recent data shows that more than 90% of all Silicon Valley job markets are held by whites.^{xxi} Gender patterns in high-tech jobs and

entrepreneurship have historically reflected traditional patterns of gendered job segmentation, with women in low-paying, limited advancement positions (such as assembly work) and men in higher-paying, career-ladder jobs (such as game designers).^{xxii} These patterns have begun to shift slightly in the last decade, with more women entering non-traditional sectors especially as entrepreneurs, yet the research finds that women entrepreneurs tend to not own businesses in “male-typed” high-tech sectors, such as game design firms.^{xxiii} Thus, there is ample evidence to suggest that game design, like the high-tech industry as a whole, is a white and male-dominated industry. This means that from user interface design to hardware design, it is predominantly white males who design, test and distribute video games. This is done while the importance of video games as a major vehicle of socialization in human computer interaction increases.

Video games are both a recreational activity and an educational tool, but it is as recreation that video games are marketed. As with any recreational activity, those with more income and more leisure time are more likely to purchase and play video games. However, reliable data on who gamers are is often muddled by operationalization of the term video game. For example, Nielson reports that, “the most active gamers tend to be younger males in the 12 to 17 range, living in homes that have incomes of \$75,000 or more.”^{xxiv} This study separates video games between PC and console markets but then uses combined (PC and console) numbers to report on female game use of casual games (e.g., *Solitaire* or *Hearts*). Inclusion of casual games typically leads to higher estimates of the number of players with higher percentages of women and a greater diversity of ethnic groups. In comparison, the NPD Group released the *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry*.^{xxv} This study reported that as of 2009, the average age of

video gamers is 34 years of age but that “women age 18 or older represent a significantly greater portion of the game playing population (33%) than boys 17 or younger (20%).” However, NPD Group combines the PC and console markets. Further, this study, like many of widely cited studies of gamers, is funded primarily by the game industry which has a vested interest in inflating these numbers.^{xxvi,xxvii}

“Border Patrol”: Games Created by Movement White Supremacists

Tom Metzger, a former Ku Klux Klan leader, a television repairman by trade, and a one-time candidate for Congress combines the elements of both showcasing and private uses of the Internet at his website, “The Insurgent.” Metzger’s web presence, like his former print media incarnation was called “W.A.R.,” an acronym for “White Aryan Resistance,” is a showcase for white supremacist ideology in which white, heterosexual men are central, people of color are referred to as “mud people,” and Jewish people are thought to control banking and media in an international conspiracy to keep down the white race.^{xxviii} Metzger is a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, but left that organization in 1983 when he formed W.A.R. and developed a more radical analysis of political economy than the KKK and dropped any reference to Christianity.^{xxix} To spread the message of W.A.R., Metzger created both print and broadcast vehicles: a newsletter, titled “W.A.R.,” a cable access television show called “Race and Reason” and a radio broadcast.^{xxx} All these media are now showcased and available via Metzger’s website, “The Insurgent” located at the URL www.resist.com. The website includes position statements about a variety of topics including immigration, international conflicts (most

often involving Israel), homosexuality, and women. Prominently featured on the website is a link to purchase Aryan-branded merchandise (t-shirts, caps, key chains). The merchandise page includes the use of some forms that require a user login but to actually place an order, the end-user has to print out and mail in an order form with a check or money order. Aside from these forms, most of the features on the website are primarily static, and function as one-way transfers of information.

One of the noteworthy features on Metzger's website because it is unique to the digital media environment and was not available during the print-era, is the selection of hate-filled computer games. These games, with names like *Drive By 2* where players can experience *What it is Like in the Ghetto*, *African Detroit Cop*, *Watch Out Behind You Hunter*, situate gamers as shooters (in the convention of video games). Interestingly, most of these games originate on humor sites like *Newgrounds.com* and are downloaded and rebranded by Metzger as games for and by white supremacists. In these racist games Metzger's racist version of these games, players are instructed to "shoot the fags before they rape you,"; in the game called, *Border Patrol*, with the tag line, "Don't Let Those Spics Cross Our Border," gamers are encouraged to "shoot the spics." The games allow individual users to download and play the games on their own computers. In addition to being violently racist and homophobic, the computer games are also deeply gendered in ways that are consistent with more mainstream games; that is, the games socialize boys into misogyny and exclude girls from all but the most stereotypical roles.^{xxxix} Research clearly demonstrates that adolescents are more likely to play computer games than adults; among adolescents, boys are more likely than girls to be gamers.^{xxxix} Adolescents are also significantly more likely than adults to say that violence is their favorite part of

gaming.^{xxxiii} Metzger has included these computer games on his website to appeal to his core audience: young, white males. However, without an evaluation of his internal website statistics which are not publicly available, it is impossible to know how effective Metzger's racist games are with the intended audience.

Metzger's computer games are crude bits of gaming code that barely adhere to standards in gaming^{xxxiv} and seem unlikely to meet the minimum demands of sophisticated gamers who have grown up playing *Everquest*, *Mortal Kombat*, or *Grand Theft Auto*. While games like the ones that show up on Metzger's site are considered crude, these games do present an opportunity for players to explore or act upon beliefs that may be otherwise hidden from the public. *Border Patrol* made headlines in 2009 when a Georgia Councilman was forced to resign after emailing a link to the game to employees of Kennesaw, Georgia's local government.^{xxxv} Conversely, the higher production values of popular video games use the typical color-blind rhetoric as a building block for the procedures represented in their systems. The use of this rhetoric creates opportunities for players to perform what would normally be private acts, at home, alone, or with friends.

“Grand Theft Auto” & “Saints Row”: Subtle Racism in Popular Games

Some of the most complicated procedural rhetorics created for mainstream consumption are the *Grand Theft Auto* series of video games. These games represent thousands of hours of development time from hundreds of people working to represent a particular cross-section of society. We are examining two of the *Grand Theft Auto* games: *Grand Theft Auto III: San Andreas* (GTA:SA) and *Grand Theft Auto IV* (GTAIV). These two games represent the opposite coasts through their settings (Los Angeles and New

York City) as well as two different perspectives of minority groups. GTA4 represents an immigrant's path to respect and honest work in the harsh, racially segregated, urban environment.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is about an African American male named Carl "CJ" Johnson. Like Metzger's games, but perhaps with less intention, Rockstar has embedded certain African American racial stereotypes within the game. First, nearly every black character, Hispanic, or non-white character is represented as a gang banger. While some characters approach CJ from outside this realm (James Woods provides the voice of a "government agent"), they almost always treat him as the ontologically suspect black man from the inner city.^{xxxvi} The similarities between CJ Johnson and Eddie Murphy's character in the film *African Detroit Cop* are rather astonishing in the way that they both replay centuries-old tropes of systemic racism. Both games display African Americans as hapless, violence-causing miscreants that will only change their anti-social behavior if threatened with loss of money. The *GTA:SA* also conveys racial stereotypes via food choices. Throughout the game, African American characters are restricted to food choices from a limited range of fast food restaurants with names meant to evoke the ghetto. Even when CJ owns a large portion of California at the end of the game, he can still only eat at three different fast food restaurants in the game: Burger Shot, Cluckin' Bell, and The Well Stacked Pizza. CJ gains and loses weight according to the number of meals he eats per day. The implications of the programming behind this meal plan for the African American protagonist is that CJ's blackness is inherent and immutable; the upward mobility possible by succeeding in the game does not offer an escape from this embodiment. In the rhetoric of the game, CJ will always be black and therefore, will

always favor fast food.^{xxxvii} This digital representation of blackness has little to do with actual material experience of any individual black person, rather the digital represents the game programmers' misperception of the embodiment of blackness.

In contrast to CJ Johnson is Niko Bellic, the white immigrant from Easter Europe, who is the central figure in *Grand Theft Auto IV*. . Niko comes to America after events that occurred during the Bosnian War come back to haunt him. His life is one of violence and he will commit violence for almost anyone. From steroid addled white body builders to Puerto Rican female drug dealers, Niko will commit violence without remorse on anyone he is asked to. This game approaches racism toward immigrants from European nations that have not become part of the “white” group. The stereotypes that GTAIV picks up on are the same ones that were used in the movie *2012* as well as *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. However, unlike CJ who remains part of the inner city forever, Niko inevitably obtains his place in white society in a dramatic fashion by murdering the corrupt white foreign businessman at the foot of the statue of liberty. While CJ is doomed to stay in the inner city, Niko, a newcomer, bypasses all of them. History has shown that this acceptance cannot be asked for, only accessed through hard work^{xxxviii} One of *Grand Theft Auto*'s direct competitors is the gangland simulation, *Saints Row*.

Saint's Row differs from the *Grand Theft Auto* series by presenting a much bleaker, more violent picture of an urban gang environment. From the introduction, the player is thrust into a world of violence and bloodshed. The solution, as stated by the leader of the “3rd Street Saints” says, “...it's all about respect. Get enough of it, they're gonna back off and we're gonna move right on in.”^{xxxix} This introduction serves two

distinct racially motivated ideas. First, the solution is not hard work to gain power, but respect. Respect comes through violence and fear of that violence is how one gains respect. This reflects a general fear of minority groups gaining power and is distinct in a variety of Metzger's videos and video games. This fear comes to a head at the end of the game when a corrupt white businessman tells the main character, "...until you came along, I was displacing poor people. Now I'm destroying a hotbed of gang activity." The last scene of *Saint's Row* is of that businessman's yacht exploding.^{xl} Unlike in Metzger's games, overt racism is punished in this world.

Saint's Row 2 creates an environment in which the urban gangs gain power in popular society alongside government entities and enforcement agencies. However, from the beginning mission it is clear that the successes of the player's character in the previous game have been corrupted. The first impulse of the main character is to kill all of the last game's characters. Players then kill their way back to the top with no discernable goal other than to "gain respect." At the end of this game, the character who began *Saint's Row* saying, "*It's all about respect*" is revealed as an ally of the white man. This character says, as he dies, "*Don't you get it? The Saints didn't solve a goddamn thing...all we did is turn into vice kings that wore purple.*"^{xli} The *Saint's Row* games almost directly reference the undercurrent of systemic racism running through the dominant white culture in the U.S. by designing a situation in which the player can only succeed by committing violence and perpetuating racist stereotypes.

These four games are a primarily white interpretation of African American culture for white people to play. In this way, video games represent a way in which systemic racism is expressed differently than in the offline world. The creation of a private sphere

to explore the thoughts and values game makers put into their games allow players to explore certain aspects of their racially motivated beliefs that they may not know or understand they have. Many of the currents that run through these games are not labeled as racist until they end up on a website like Metzgers. And, because Metzger's site is poorly designed and because his games are "crude," many players brush those games off as "hate group messages." After getting off the computer, that person then proceeds to go to a virtual inner city and "do" racism as Metzger intends. In this way, players can do racism, privately, in the backstage^{xlii} without any sort of repercussions for their actions.

Post-Racial: Racism in the Era of Colorblindness

Racism, both overt and more subtle, in video games exists in a social context in the contemporary U.S. that is at odds with such displays of racism. The prevailing view in the U.S. is that some fifty years after the civil rights era and with the election of an African American president, that the highest ideal and most appropriate moral response to racism is one of colorblindness, or "not noticing" race.^{xliii} The ideological orientation toward colorblindness has implications for racism online. A recent study links colorblind racial ideology to racism online and off.^{xliv} The study examined the relationship between responses to racial theme party images on social networking sites and a color-blind racial ideology, found that white students and those who rated highly in color-blind racial attitudes were more likely not to be offended by images from racially themed parties. In other words, the more "color-blind" someone was, the less likely they would be to find parties at which attendees dressed and acted as caricatures of racial stereotypes (e.g., photos of students dressed in blackface make-up attending a "gangsta party" to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day) offensive. To conduct the study, Tynes

and Markoe showed 217 ethnically diverse college students images from racially themed parties and prompted them to respond as if they were writing on a friend's Facebook or MySpace page. Fifty-eight percent of African-Americans were unequivocally bothered by the images, compared with only 21 percent of whites. The majority of white respondents (41 percent) were in the bothered-ambivalent group, and 24 percent were in the not bothered-ambivalent group. In the written response portion of the study, the responses ranged from approval and nonchalance ("OMG!! I can't believe you guys would think of that!!! Horrible ... but kinda funny not gonna lie") to mild outrage ("This is obscenely offensive"). The participants were also asked questions about their attitudes toward racial privilege, institutional discrimination and racial issues. Those who scored higher on the measure were more likely to hold color-blind racial attitudes, and were more likely to be ambivalent or not bothered by the race party photos. Respondents low in racial color-blindness were much more vocal in expressing their displeasure and opposition to these images, and would even go so far as to "de-friend" someone over posting those images. Yet, that culture of supposed 'colorblindness' is set within a broader social and historical reality of systemic racism that includes both historical racism of slavery and the contemporary manifestations of institutional discrimination and ongoing individual acts of racism.

Fun & Games: Taking Racism Seriously

Mainstream Internet culture is centrally concerned with humor. For evidence of this, one need only refer to the immense popularity of LOL cats, an Internet meme and a booming online subculture built around digital images and deliberately bad grammar. A

few months after launching the site icanhascheezburger.com, the site receives around 200,000 unique visitors, a half-million page views each day, and ad revenues earn the site's owner a comfortable income.^{xlv} Even the attack on the World Trade Center is fodder for Internet jokes through visual collages, assembled from phrases and pictures from popular media.^{xlvi} The high value placed on humor has implications for understanding responses to racism.

Within this *milieu* it can be difficult to challenge racism or take it seriously. Take, for example, the practice of "racist griefing" in online video games. "Griefing" in online gaming is similar to "trash talking" to opponents that might happen on a basketball court or a football field; in gaming, the griefing happens in online interactions, and often times this griefing becomes explicitly racist (e.g., opponents typing "NIGGER, NIGGER, NIGGER" at one another). Lisa Nakamura makes the point that the "racist griefing" that goes on in online games which often makes explicit use of racist epithets, which she explains this way: "The n-word is funny because it is so extreme that no one could really mean it. And humor is all about 'not meaning it.' If you take humor and the n-word, you get enlightened racism online and attention." She calls this "enlightened racism." Nakamura goes on to argue that paradoxically, "the worse the racism and sexism are, the more extreme and cartoonish it is, the harder it is to take seriously, and the harder it is to call it out." She astutely observes that for those within gaming culture, calling out racism in this context signals you as someone "not of the gaming culture" and thus, as someone who is taking racism "too seriously" and doesn't have a good sense of humor. Yet, this sort of humor is a "confusing discursive mode for young people," she observes, because they are "unable to separate enlightened racism from regular racism." And,

indeed, I think this is a real problem here. As Nakamura notes, the image of the “humorless feminist” is now joined with the image of a “humorless” old(er) person who takes race too seriously.^{xlvi} Within gaming culture, humor trumps any concerns about the harm of racism.

A similar phenomenon is evident in the exuberant embrace of the comedy of Leeroy Jenkins from the game *World of Warcraft* and has become a hugely popular Internet meme. Leeroy Jenkins is a character originated by Ben Schulz (who is white). The encounter within the game starts a group of friends are attempting to defeat a monster. During a conversation between the leaders of the group, Jamaal and Abduhl talk about strategy and tactic to defeat the monster that sits on the other side of a door. In the midst of discussing their strategy, Leeroy Jenkins (one of the group who has been marked as ‘AFK’ or away from the keyboard, supposedly to microwave some chicken. The groups’ plan is ruined when Leeroy returns and, ignorant of the strategy, charges headlong into battle shouting his own name in a stylized battle cry. His companions rush to help, but Leeroy's actions ruin the meticulous plan, and all of the group members are killed. At the end of this battle, while his friends deride him for his reckless behavior, Leeroy can be heard saying, “well at least I have chicken.” This interaction within the game has been captured on YouTube video which now has over 21 millions views. The popularity of the Leeroy Jenkins meme reaches well beyond the *World of Warcraft* players, and into the broader popular culture^{xlvi} and many of these are racialized. For example, the site “You’re the Man Now Dog” (YTMND), includes a picture of an African American man in medieval armor (Martin Lawrence from his movie *Black Knight*) standing in front of a Kentucky Fried Chicken and a bucket of chicken repeating

the phrase, “at least I have chicken” to the song “I Got the Power.”^{xlix}.

Leeroy Jenkins is one of the only representations of blackness in *World of Warcraft*, a universe in which all humans are white.^l The humor in the Leeroy Jenkins meme is dependent on a number of racist stereotypes about “hapless negroes” who are so impulsive and distracted by their love of chicken that they miss what’s important and destroy those around them (and themselves). Yet, any attempts to take the racism in this humor seriously get dismissed by gamers. As Tanner Higgins observes about these failed attempts at calling out the racism in the Leeroy Jenkins humor, “these questions are buried beneath claims of comedy and the insignificance of race in the game world.”^{li} While Higgins contends that racism in online gaming is easy to dismiss because it is ephemeral, unlike racism in the material world, gaming scholar Christopher Ritter disagrees. For Ritter the minimization of racism in online games is an extension of minimization of racism elsewhere.^{lii} In this way, confronting the systemic racism in gaming culture is rendered impossible through both the denial of racism in ‘colorblindness’ and the valuation of humor above all else.

Conclusion

Racism exists in online games in a variety of forms, both overt and more subtle. Even as video games become increase in popularity, few within gaming culture, acknowledge the systemic racism in many of these games. Here, we have argued that the reasons for this are multifaceted. Simultaneous with vitriolic racist hate speech, often spread via the Internet and video games, the dominant white culture claims to be ‘colorblind’ and dismisses concerns about racism as irrelevant. Added to this is an Internet culture, also predominantly white, in which humor is the highest value and

charges of racism are regarded as the purview of the humorless and the overly serious. The racism in online video games is built into the very procedural rhetorics of the games, yet remarking upon race is seen as more problematic than the harm of racism. and pointing out racism marks one as an outsider to gaming culture.

The predictions of the early days of the Internet that the emergence of virtual environments and a culture of digital fantasy would mean an escape from the material realities of race and expansion of identity tourism. Video game design and play provide designers and gamers, primarily white males, *entrée* to and sinecure in a hegemonic space within the imbricated worlds of the digital and the material. In some ways, the contradictory and overlapping qualities of overt racism (e.g., in Metzger's games) and the more subtle racism in popular video games speaks to the paradoxical nature of racism that characterizes the current historical moment.

Table 1

Q4		Race		Total	
		White	Non-White		
Does your Son or Daughter ever play video games?	Yes	Count	719	254	973
			73.9%	26.1%	100.0%
	No	Count	91	21	112
			81.3%	18.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	810	275	1085
			74.7%	25.3%	100.0%

End Notes

ⁱ Thorsen, Tor. 2009. "US gamer population: 170 million – NPD." *GameSpot*. Posted on July 31, 2009; accessed November 27, 2010. Accessed online here: <http://www.gamespot.com/news/6214598.html>

ⁱⁱ Nakamura, Lisa. 2002. *Cybertypes*. (New York: Routledge)

ⁱⁱⁱ Lisa Nakamura. 2008. *Digitizing Race*. (New York: Routledge); Dara N. Byrne, 2007. The Future of (the) "Race": Identity, Discourse, and the Rise of Computer-mediated Public Spheres. In *Race and Ethnicity*, edited by A. Everett.

^{iv} Valkyrie, Zeke. "Gender in MMORPG's," Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Meetings, Atlanta, Georgia, August, 2010.

^v In this chapter, we use the term *systemic racism* to refer to the way that enduring and systemic racial stereotypes, ideas, images, emotions, proclivities, and practices have thoroughly pervaded social, cultural and economic institutions. This systemic racism includes both subtle and overt expressions. Significant changes have occurred in systemic racism over time, primarily through the political struggles organized by people of color, yet it remains a central feature in most major social institutions. For more on this view, see Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

^{vi} Huizinga, Johan. 1950. *Homo Ludens*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

^{vii} Bogost, Ian. 2007. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press.

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- ^{ix} Karen E. Dill & Kathryn P. Thill, "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions," *Sex Roles* (2007) 57: 851-864.
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